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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001243

SIPDIS

OSD FOR ASD JAMES SHINN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2018

TAGS: [PARM](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: ROKG REVIEWING ITS AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION  
ASSISTANCE

REF: A. SEOUL 1204  
[B](#). SEOUL 1174  
[C](#). SEOUL 1153  
[D](#). SEOUL 1145

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun, Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In the face of multiple requests for assistance from the U.S., Afghanistan, and other nations, as well as renewed Taliban threats against Korean interests in Afghanistan and concerns over political sensitivities arising out of the recent beef protests, the ROKG has started an internal review of its overall reconstruction assistance plans for Afghanistan. As a result, the dispatch slated for mid-June of a ROK Police Trainer survey team to Kabul has been postponed until the review can be completed. The ROKG plans to consider the multiple pending requests for additional contributions, including police trainers, military train and equip, an expanded medical and vocational team at Bagram, and economic development and elections assistance, before committing to providing any additional assistance. The ROKG will deliver on its recent Paris Conference commitment of USD 30 million in grant aid and the ROK civilian medical team at Bagram Air Base will open its new clinic on June 30th as scheduled. Encouraging the ROKG to make additional contributions is likely to become more difficult in the short to medium term. END SUMMARY.

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MANY REQUESTS, MANY RISKS  
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[1](#)2. (C) The past six weeks have seen candlelight vigil after candlelight vigil as the ROK public have continued to express their dissatisfaction with President Lee Myung-bak and his administration's handling of the decision to resume imports of U.S. beef (see reftels). Progress on U.S.-ROK Alliance issues across the board has fallen victim to the resulting political paralysis, as ROKG officials have taken care to put all problematic Alliance issues on the back burner for fear of inciting the nascent anti-Americanism that the protests thus far have assiduously avoided. The question of the ROK's continued role in Afghanistan appears to be suffering a similar fate.

[1](#)3. (C) Despite a genuine desire and expectation among the

Korean public for a greater international role for the ROK, participation in international efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan remain overwhelmingly seen through the U.S.-ROK Alliance lens. On June 19, Kim Hyon-du, Deputy, U.S.-ROK Security Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) told poloff on that the ROKG has put on hold all decisions on further ROK contributions to Afghanistan until a full review of the options and benefits can be completed. As part of this review, Kim informed poloff that the ROKG had indefinitely postponed the planned dispatch of a survey team to Kabul in mid-June as part of preparations to send ROK police trainers. Kim explained that a comprehensive review was necessary for two reasons. First, he said at last count, the ROKG had received fourteen nonpapers in recent months asking for different types of ROK contributions. The second reason, which Kim took great care to explain repeatedly, was that the current political climate would not support a decision to commit any additional resources in Afghanistan at this time. Kim said the timeline for the ROKG review was unclear, but emphasized that decisions were unlikely until after the Lee administration recovered from the current crisis.

¶4. (C) While political sensitivities stemming from the beef protests are likely to subside over time, ROKG officials continue to emphasize that the safety and security of ROK personnel and interests in Afghanistan is the number one factor in any decisions to contribute to Afghanistan's reconstruction. ROKG interlocutors point to last year's ROK hostage crisis in Afghanistan as a significant limitation on what the public would support. (Note: In August 2007, Taliban terrorists kidnapped and held hostage 23 ROK relief workers in Afghanistan, killing two of the Korean hostages. The hostage situation received extensive ROK media coverage and generated significant negative public reaction for the ROKG's poor handling of the negotiations. End Note.)

¶5. (C) In May, just before the beef protests began in earnest, ROK sensitivities on Afghanistan were again heightened when the Yonhap news service reported that a Taliban spokesperson contacted one of its reporters directly and promised to target Korean individuals, diplomats, facilities, and business interests throughout Afghanistan if the ROK decided to again send police, military, or missionaries. According to MOFAT's Kim Hyon-du, if there were another hostage incident in Afghanistan because the ROKG decided to send troops or police, after last month's press coverage of the warnings, it could become a magnet for Anti-American, or Anti-Alliance, sentiment. More than that, the Lee Administration could again be paralyzed through more protests. The ROKG does not want its contributions to Afghanistan to be a "burden on the ROK, the U.S., or the U.S.-ROK Alliance," he said.

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WHAT ROK HAS COMMITTED TO DO  
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¶6. (C) While further ROK contributions are under review, Kim emphasized that the ROKG will continue to implement, on the timeline as planned, those projects already underway, including:

-- MEDICAL/VOCATIONAL TEAM: After terminating its tremendously-successful military medical unit deployment in December 2007, the ROKG dispatched a KOICA-led, civilian medical team to establish a new clinic at Bagram Air Base in January. As of June, the team of civilian doctors, nurses, and medical administrative staff has grown to approximately 25 and the new two-floor, 150-patient capacity clinic is slated to open on June 30. As originally planned, the ROKG plans to send an additional 5-6 members, including a few National Police and KOICA contractors who will open a vocational training program co-located with the medical team by the end of 2008. (Note: This medical and vocational team is what the ROKG refers to as a "ROK PRT.")

-- USD 30 MILLION IN GRANT AID: At the June Paris Conference,

the ROKG pledged an additional USD 30 million in grant aid for reconstruction in Afghanistan, to be provided in roughly equal increments over the next three years. The date disbursements will begin remains undetermined.

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OTHER OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION  
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17. (C) Decisions on all other potential ROKG contributions in Afghanistan have been postponed, however. Kim repeatedly stressed that the pause to review further contributions in Afghanistan did NOT signal a diminished ROK commitment to helping Afghanistan rebuild. Rather, the ROKG wanted to take this time to give full and careful consideration to the numerous possibilities, including:

-- EXPANDED MEDICAL/VOCATIONAL TEAM: Kim said that the ROKG is still considerably favoring expanding the numbers and scope of its medical and vocational training program at Bagram. ROKG officials continue to label this option "an expanded PRT" role, but indicate that it will NOT expand to include a military deployment to provide security. DFM Lee reiterated earlier calls for U.S.-provided security for an expanded "ROK PRT" with ASD Shinn on June 18.

-- ELECTIONS ASSISTANCE: Kim Hyon-du said that the ROKG delegation at the Paris Conference earlier this month had received requests from the U.S. and Afghanistan to provide unspecified "elections assistance" for next year's nationwide elections in Afghanistan. Kim explained that the ROKG was requesting additional information through its embassies in Washington and Kabul to determine what this assistance would entail, but he indicated that the ROKG could favorably consider some sort of financial or civilian assistance for Afghanistan's elections.

-- POLICE TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT: In response to high-level U.S. requests, including from Secretary of Defense Gates in early-June, the ROKG had planned to dispatch a survey team to Kabul to determine whether the ROK could send up to two dozen police trainers to assist the Afghan National Police. Originally slated for mid-June, the dispatch of the survey team has been indefinitely postponed pending the ROKG review of its overall assistance programs for Afghanistan.

-- TRAIN AND EQUIP AFGHAN MILITARY: Kim said that there had been multiple requests to train various components of the Afghan military and provide paramilitary equipment to military and law enforcement forces, but indicated that the details of the requests were unclear.

-- AIRPORT RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT: At the Paris Conference, Deputy Foreign Minister Oh Joon consulted with the Lithuanian representatives on potential ROK support of the planned reconstruction of the Chaghcharan airport.

-- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: Kim relayed that DFM Lee was interested in learning more about ASD Shinn's suggestion at his June 18 meeting that the ROK provide some sort of "economic development" assistance based on the ROK's extensive post-war experience and economic success. This could be a promising option, DFM Lee said, particularly if ROK concerns about security could be mitigated.

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) Encouraging the ROKG to expand its contributions to reconstruction and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan has always been a challenge; it is likely to become even more challenging in the short to medium-term, even after the current political sensitivities subside and the day-to-day business of the Alliance resumes. Despite USG efforts to shift perceptions, the ROKG has always viewed any contributions it makes in Afghanistan (and Iraq) as a way of demonstrating the ROK commitment to the U.S.-ROK Alliance.

The National Assembly and Korean public are aware of this and can be expected to take issue with any decisions for further assistance seen as coming from U.S. pressure. In the post-beef protests atmosphere, convincing the ROKG to take this risk with their public may prove more difficult than ever. This is particularly true of sending additional personnel to Afghanistan, because the ROKG believes any casualty would lead to massive protests. However, in support of the Alliance, the ROKG will still want to do all it can to help in Afghanistan, but proper motivation, for instance in the form of a crystal clear message about what ROK contributions are expected and most valued by the U.S., will be key. Our recommendation is that these requests be limited to goods and services, not additional personnel.

VERSHBOW